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ABSTRACT

Described in this synopsis are the results of a public opinion survey concerning Michigan citizens' attitudes toward findings of the final report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The survey was conducted during weekday evening hours between June 23 and 30, 1983. A majority of respondents strongly favored most of the recommendations made by the Commission, especially those to strengthen high school graduation requirements and to lengthen the school week. Other results concerned citizens' attitudes toward (1) instituting more stringent high school course requirements, (2) strengthening the teaching profession, (3) ranking the seriousness of problems in education, and (5) improving financial support for education. The 41-question closed-form questionnaire used to conduct the interview is included, and the percent of response for each question is also given. (BJD)

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A Summary

OPINIONS OF MICHIGAN CITIZENS ABOUT RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

An Overview of Findings from a Statewide Public Opinion Survey of a Cross-section of 400 Michigan Adults; Interviewed by Telephone, June 23-30, 1983

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Conducted by the
Technical Assistance Center
Ingham Intermediate School District
Mason, Michigan

for

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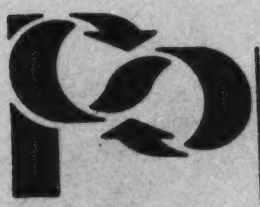

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Citizens in Michigan strongly favored most of the recommendations made by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, especially those to strengthen high school graduation requirements.

Opinions of a cross-section of 400 Michigan adults were obtained in a recent statewide public opinion survey conducted by Project Outreach of the Michigan State Board of Education. The telephone survey, conducted during weekday, evening hours between June 23-30, 1983, was drawn from a random probability sampling of telephone households in the state, by random digit dialing (RDD) techniques.

A majority of citizens polled favored a 7-hour school day for students, one of th. recommendations of the National Commission. While this was favored (by a margin of 55% to 41%), Michigan adults opposed -- by a slim majority (51% to 43%) lengthening the school year from its 180 days to 200 days.

Other survey results are shown below:

Support for Stronger High School Graduation Requirements

The National Commission on Excellence in Education urged that state and local high school graduation requirements be strengthened. Almost all (97%) of the adults polled in this survey favored a requirement that students pass reading and mathematics tests in order to graduate from high school.

Survey respondents expressed overwhelming approval (91%) of the suggestion that the State Board of Education recommend high school graduation requirements. In addition, three-fourths (75%) of those polled favored the State of Michigan mandating high school graduation requirements.

In addition, more than two-thirds (69%) favored an increase in the amount of homework expected of high school students. When informed that the national report said the amount of homework for high school seniors has decreased over

the last several years, 36% said that was a "very serious" problem, and 38% felt it was "somewhat serious". Only 20% of those polled did not feel that was a fairly serious problem.

Further, nearly seven out of every 10 persons (69%) described as a "very serious" problem the fact that average achievement of high school students on standardized tests is now lower than 25 years ago.

Strengthening High School Course Requirements

Michigan citizens strongly endorsed all of the recommendations of the National Commission to strengthen the curriculum requirements of all high school students. Survey respondents approved what the National Commission termed the "Five New Basics", as follows:

* 4 years of English (83% favor)
* 3 years of Math (92% favor)
* 3 years of Science (67% favor)
* 3 years of Social Studies (66% favor)
* ½ year of Computer Science (86% favor)

and, for the college-bound:

* 2 years of Foreign Language (60% favor)

Other than the "Five New Basics", survey respondents were asked for their suggestions on other subjects schools should teach. Topping the list of free-response suggestions was vocational-technical education (endorsed by 23% of those interviewed). Other content area suggestions included fine arts (14%), sex education/home management skills (10%), physical education (9%), and business courses or consumer math "life survival" skills, each with 8% of responses.

Strengthening the Teaching Profession

Survey respondents also strongly endorsed recommendations made by the Commission to strengthen the teaching profession.

Three out of every four persons polled (73%) favored the idea of offering incentives, such as grants or loans, to attract outstanding students into teaching.

Further, the vast majority of respondents (87%) agreed with a Commission statement that persons preparing to teach should be required to meet higher standards. And nearly every person interviewed (97%) believe that "teachers should be required to demonstrate competency in the subject area they teach."

In the report of the National Commission, one recommendation included the matter of compensation for teachers. The majority of Michigan adults (56%) agreed with the Commission suggestion that "there should be increases in pay for people in the teaching profession." The national report also urged that teacher salaries should be tied to an effective evaluation system, so that "superior teachers can be rewarded, average ones encouraged, and poor ones either improved or terminated." Three out of every four (76%) of Michigan's survey respondents said they favored such a suggestion.

In addition, seven out of every ten respondents (70%) also favored employment of teachers on an 11-month basis, to provide time for teachers to work on improving the school program for students.

Citizen Response to Problems in Education

In responding to problems in education as defined by the National Commission, eight out of every ten respondents (83%) described as "very serious" the fact that 10% of all 17 year olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate.

Another very serious educational problem, said the majority (51%) of those interviewed, is that the average tested achievement of students graduating from college is lower than it was several years ago.

Nearly one of (48%) of those polled felt it was very serious that over one-half of the gifted students in school do not match their ability with their achievements in school. Another 35% felt this was somewhat of a serious problem.

The Commission report indicated that students in American schools spend less time each year in school than do students in other industrialized countries of the world. Forty-five percent (45%) of Michigan citizens feel that is a very serious problem while another 29% feel it is a "somewhat serious" problem. Further, 43% said it was very serious and 38% somewhat serious that entrance requirements to colleges in this country have been declining in recent years.

Improving Financial Support for Education

The plurality of survey respondents (41%) said, if schools are to improve, it will take a partnership effort, spearheaded by local boards of education. One out of every five citizens (22%) believe such improvement is the responsibility of the federal government and another 21% place that improvement effort at the state level. Another 14% said such improvement is a joint responsibility of all three levels of government -- federal, state and local school boards.

Those who assigned improvement of education at the state level, said such improvement is the responsibility of the State Board of Education (61%). Another 12% said the Governor holds that responsibility while 11% felt it was up to the state legislature.

When asked if they believe people in Michigan are willing to make a substantial financial investment in education, the majority (53%) of those polled said "no." In a later, follow-up question, 47% of those interviewed said they would be willing to pay $200 more per year in higher taxes to help finance major improvements in the public schools. (That compares with 51% who said "yes" to the same question in a February, 1983 nationwide opinion survey conducted by the New York Times.)

Other responses to the question on taxpayer willingness to finance educational improvements included 17% who gave a conditional, guarded "yes" response, 32% who said "no" and 4% who had no opinion.

In a related question, survey respondents were asked, "Who should pay for improving education?" Twenty-five percent of those polled (25%) pinpointed the Federal government while another 25% said such funding was the responsibility of a combination of Federal and state governments and local school boards. In addition, 21% said such financing was a state responsibility and 18% felt it was a local responsibility.

* * *

The survey sample size of 400 respondents is based upon a 95% confidence that sample error is no greater than 5%. Average length of the telephone interview was 12 minutes. Respondents were chosen by the Respondent Selection Method developed by Carter and Kish, based upon the number of persons 18 years of age and older who lived in the household and the proportion of males and females. Fifty-eight percent of those interviewed were female, 42% were male.

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Project Outreach is a project of the Michigan State Board of Education and is funded by the Michigan Legislature. Opinion polling activities are one of the major components of the statewide Outreach effort.

WHEN SELECTED PERSON IS OTHER THAN YOUR INITIAL CONTACT SAY:

Hello, this is_____. I'm a volunteer calling for the_____Michigan State Board of Education. We're doing a survey to find out what Michigan residents think about the public schools.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education recently released a report calling for major changes in the public schools. We'd like to ask some questions about the recommendations they made. My questions will take about 10 minutes. Is this a convenient time for your?

(IF PROPER RESPONDENT IS READY, START WITH #1. IF NOT, MAKE APPOINTMENT FOR A CALL-BACK.)

1. Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D or E to describe the quality of their work in school. Suppose the public schools in your community were graded in the same way. What grade would you give your local public schools? A, B, C, D or E? (CIRCLE ONE)

A	10%	
B	37	
C	27	
D	6	
E	4	
Can't say	16	(10

2. Have you heard anything about the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education?

Yes (GO TO #3)	34%	
No (IF NO SKIP TO QUESTIONS #4)	65	
Can't recall	1	(11

3. Where did you hear or read about the report? (PROBE:) Did you hear about it anywhere else? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY.)

Radio	23%	
TV	47	
Newspaper	60	
School publication	1	
Word of mouth	7	
Magazine	7	
School/community function	4	
Other (SPECIFY:)_____	4	(12-
Can't say	1	(14-

The Commission on Education made several recommendations that could influence the future of education in America. Please tell me if you favor or oppose the following recommendations:

		Favor	Oppose	Can't say	Favor if does not cost money	
4.	First, a seven-hour school day for all students instead of five or six hours... do you favor or oppose that?	55%	41%	3%	-	(16)
5.	Increase the amount of homework expected of high school students?	69	24	7	-	(17)
6.	An extension of the school year from 180 days to 200 days?	43	51	5	-	(18)
7.	A requirement that students pass reading and mathematics tests in order to graduate from high school?	97	1	2	-	(19)
8.	A requirement of four years of English for all high school students?	83	12	5	-	(20)
9.	A requirement of three years of science for all high school students?	67	27	6	-	(21)
10.	A requirement of three years of mathematics for all high school students?	92	7	-	-	(22)
11.	A requirement of three years of social studies for all high school students?	66	30	4	-	(23)
12.	A requirement for one-half year of computer science for all high school students?	86	10	3	-	(24)
13.	Offer incentives, such as grants or loans to attract outstanding students into teaching?	73	21	6	-	(25)
14.	A requirement of two years of a foreign language for college-bound students?	60	34	5	-	(26)
15.	Persons preparing to teach should be required to meet higher standards?	87	8	5	-	(27)
16.	There should be increases in pay for people in the teaching profession.	56	27	16	1%	(28)
17.	Employ teachers on an 11-month basis to work on improving the school program for students.	70	22	6	1	(29)
18.	Teachers should be required to demonstrate competency in the subject area they teach?	97	1	1	-	(30)
19.	Salaries for teachers should be tied to an effective evaluation system to reward superior teachers?	76	19	5	-	(31)

20. The National Commission believes that schools should provide a good basic education in the 3 R's, plus science, social studies, computer science and foreign language. Other than that, what other subjects do you think schools should teach? (PROBE:) Can you suggest any others? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY).

Vocation-technical education	23%	
Fine arts	14	
Business courses	8	
How to get along with people	7	
"Life survival", consumer math skills	8	
Other math courses	3	
Physicial education	9	
Sex education, home management	10	(32-33
Other (SPECIFY:)_____	32	(34-35
_____		
Can't say	26	(36-37
None	8	

The Commission also reported on a number of other problems in education in this country. As I name each item, tell me how serious a problem is that. Do you think it is very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not serious at all?

	Very Serious	Somewhat Serious	Not Too Serious	Not Serious At All	Can't Say	
21. The amount of homework for high school seniors has decreased over the last several years.	36%	38%	17%	3%	4%	(38)
22. Average achievement of high school students on standardized tests is now lower than 25 years ago.	69	22	5	1	2	(39)
23. Over 10% of all 17-year olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate.	83	11	4	-	3	(40)
24. Over one-half of the gifted students in school do not match their ability with their achievements in school	48	35	9	2	5	(41)
25. Entrance requirements to college have been declining in recent years.	43	38	13	3	4	(42)
26. The average tested achievement of students graduating from college is lower than it was several years ago.	51	37	6	2	3	(43)
27. Students in American schools spend less time each year in school than do students in other industrialized countries of the world.	45	29	17	6	3	(44)

28. According to the Commission report, if American schools are to improve, our nation will have to put more emphasis on education. In your opinion, who should have the main responsibility for improving America's schools...the federal government, state government, or local boards of education?

Federal	22%	
State	21	
Local School Board	41	
Combination of Federal, State and Local Boards	14	
Can't say/no response	3	
Others	3	(45-4

29. (IF "STATE," ASK:) Who, at the State level, should do this? The Governor, the Legislature, or the State Board of Education? (MULTIPLE ANSWERS ARE O.K.)

Governor	12%	
Legislature	11	
State Board of Education	61	
Combination of all three	11	
Other (SPECIFY:)	1	
Can't say	3	(47-4

30. Many people feel that making education a priority will require quite a bit of additional funds. Do you think the people in Michigan are willing to make a substantial financial investment in education?

Yes	36%	
No	53	
Can't say/no response	11	(49)

31. In your opinion, who should pay for improving American education? Should the federal, state or local government supply the money?

Federal	25%	
State	21	
Local	18	
Combination of Federal, State, and Local Boards	25	
Can't say/no response	6	(50)

Other:
- State & Local 1%
- Federal & State 2
- Misc..... 1

32. Would you be willing to pay $200 more per year in higher taxes to help finance major improvements in the public schools?

Yes	47%	
Conditional yes	17	
No	32	
Can't say	4	(51)

33. Should the State Board of Education recommend high school graduation requirements?

Yes	91%	
No	5	
Can't say	4	(52)

34. Should the State of Michigan mandate high school graduation requirements?

Yes	75%	
No	18	
Can't say	7	(53)

These last questions are just to help us classify the opinions of the cross-section of people we are interviewing.

35. Are there children of school age (K-12) or younger, in this household?

Yes (GO TO #36)	44%	
No (SKIP TO #38)	56	(54)

36. Do the children attend public schools, private, or parochial schools?

Local public schools (GO TO #37)	32%	
Private/parochial (SKIP TO #38)	6	
Both (GO TO #37)	1	
Neither, oldest child is pre-school age (SKIP TO #38)	3	
Children not enrolled in school (SKIP TO #38)	1	(55)

37. PUBLIC SCHOOL HOUSEHOLD ONLY

Are the children in elementary school, middle school or junior high, or senior high school? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)

Elementary	44%	(56)
Junior high/middle school	21	(57)
Senior high school	35	(58)
Can't say	-	(59)

38. Would you mind telling us the year in which you were born.

Prior to 1918 (over 65)	17%	
1918 through 1927 (56-65)	12	
1928 through 1937 (46-55)	13	
1938 through 1947 (36-45)	19	
1948 through 1957 (26-35)	24	
1958 through 1965 (18-25)	15	
Declined to answer	-	(60)

39. What is the last grade in school you had the opportunity to complete? (CIRCLE ONLY ONE)

Grade school or less (grades 1-8).....	8%
Some high school.....	11
Graduated high school (grades 9-12)...	38
Vocational/technical school.....	3
Some college.....	23
Graduated college.....	9
Post graduate work.....	8
Don't know.....	-
Declined to answer.....	- (61)

40. Which of the following income groups included your <u>total family income</u> in 1982 before taxes? (READ INCOME GROUPS).

0 to $5,000.....	9%
Over $5,000 but less than $10,000.....	11
Over $10,000 but less than $15,000....	12
Over $15,000 but less than $25,000....	22
Over $25,000 but less than $35,000....	19
More than $35,000.....	18
Don't know.....	5
Declined to answer.....	4 (62)

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO GIVE ME YOUR OPINIONS.

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INTERVIEWER: _____

COMMENTS: _____

41. SEX OF RESPONDENT:

Female.....	58
Male.....	42 (63)

A Project Outreach publication developed by the Technical Assistance Center. Project Outreach of the Michigan State Board of Education is funded by the Michigan legislature.